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Evidence in the Congo Case

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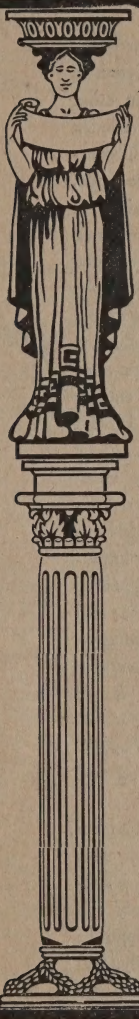

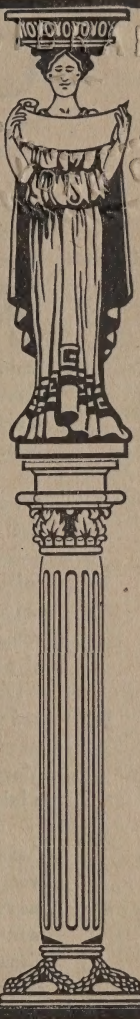

Statement in Reply to Professor Starr's Articles in the Chicago Tribune

By

John Daniels

Corresponding Secretary of the
Congo Reform Association

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Prefatory Note

ON January 20th of the present year a series of fifteen illustrated articles, entitled "Truth About The Congo Free State," began to appear in The Chicago Daily Tribune and allied papers in other parts of the country. These articles were written by Professor Frederick Starr, of the department of ethnology and anthropology of Chicago University, who had returned from a stay of over a year in the Congo Free State. The motive and purposes of his trip were ethnological, any observations of political conditions being incidental, and his Tribune articles are in the main descriptions of the mode of life of the Congo natives. But in his opening article he violently attacked the Congo Reform Movement, alleging that the contentions of its promoters as to conditions in the Free State are exaggerated, and animated more by political and commercial motives than by philanthropy, and in his concluding article he threw off the character of ethnologist altogether and adopted that of the political advocate, urging on grounds entirely distinct from the question of conditions in the Free State, that the United States take no part in overthrowing the existing Congo regime.

Had Professor Starr's articles been given to the public in a way which left clear their true nature as ethnological accounts written by a scholarly student of ethnology, the members of the Congo Reform Association would have welcomed them as an interesting and most valuable contribution to our knowledge of central African natives. But as it was, when the articles appeared not in an ethnological journal but on the first page of a daily newspaper; and when they were gtven a distorted appearance by having their minor discussion of political conditions raised to the most conspicuous place by the headline "Truth About the Congo Free State" and by subordinate headlines to suit; and when as an effect largely of such manipulation they were to some extent taken by the public as really opposing serious objections to the Congo Reform Movement; then those particularly interested in that movement decided that a brief statement in reply would be warranted.

The statement following, written by the Secretary of the Congo Reform Association (National) and approved by members of the Association who were consulted, was printed by the Chicago Record-Herald in five instalments, March 1-5. It opposes to Professor Starr's observations only the most unquestionable ex parte evidence from the Report of King Leopold's Commission of Enquiry. Professor Starr has made no counter-reply, and can make none which, if carefully analyzed, will be able to weaken the basis of the Congo Reform Movement, which is to overthrow a most monstrous and pernicious system of commercial exploitation masquerading as philanthropic government. There is nothing in his Trtbune articles which questions the existence of this system, which lies deeper than any "atrocities." The Report of the Commission of Inquiry cannot be controverted.

John Daniels.

What Evidence Shows About Congo *

Officer of Reform Association Replies to Prof. Starr, Asserting Indisputable Testimony Reveals Barbarous Treatment of Natives

By *John Daniels*
Corresponding Secretary National Congo Reform Association, Boston

THE officers of the Congo Reform Association have received a number of inquiries regarding the apparent discrepancy between Professor Starr's testimony as given in the series of articles by him which has been published, and the testimony contained in the association's statements. The simple replies to these inquiries has been: "Read the report of the Congo commission of inquiry."

This report, made by three men of King Leopold's own appointment, certainly cannot be objected to by those who would plead Leopold's cause, for it is ex parte evidence. On the other hand, those who ask for international consideration of conditions in the Free State repeatedly have expressed willingness to base their appeal on this report. It is, therefore, evidence accepted by both sides, and so deserving of the most careful examination by persons who would come fairly to a decision with reference to a situation which Leopold himself admits in an open letter of June, 1906, is "without precedent and unique."

Quotes Words of Starr

Before quoting from the report, however, we respectfully direct attention to certain significant features of Professor Starr's investigations and account.

Speaking of the serious nature of the accusations brought against the Congo regime, Professor Starr says:

"I received considerable literature from the Congo Reform Association at Boston, the reading of which had its influence in deciding me to undertake the expedition. After reading this literature, I started for the Congo fully prepared to see all kinds of horrors. I supposed that mutilations, cruelties and atrocities of the most frightful kinds would everywhere present themselves. I exqected to find a people everywhere suffering, mourning, and in unhappiness,"

It would seem that one who gave any degree of credence to such charges, as Professor Starr admits he did, and as the fact that he attached his name to a memorial to Congress, in January, 1905, making an appeal in behalf of the Congo natives, proves he did, should proceed to an investigation with the utmost care, taking every precaution, especialiy in view of the repeated charges brought against the Congo government of concealing and misrepresenting conditions, to avoid all possible attempts to have conditions shown him, as it were, on dress parade.

Takes the Opposite Course

But Professor Starr's procedure was quite the opposite. He says:

"I was not, at any time, in relations with it (the state) of such a kind as to interfere with free observations or free expression. I made this entirely clear on my first visit to the state authorities at Brussels, and it was understood by them that I should speak freely and frankly of everything which I should see. On their part the state authorities expressed the liveliest satisfaction that an independent American traveler should visit the Congo Free State, and said that they did not wish anything concealed or attenuated, as they felt that such a visit as mine could do them only good."

Professor Starr, it appears then, first told the central Congo government at Brussels, some time in advance, of his intended visit. On this account, on entering the Congo he perhaps was not obliged, like other travelers entering this region, to register fully his purposes, his proposed route, and his probable length of stay.

He made his journey up the Congo River and the Aruwimi in state steamers. He

* The statement is reprinted verbatim from the Record-Herald, with a few corrections in single words and with the insertion of several omitted lines.

was throughout dependent on native interpreters, subject to the control of the state.

Should Discount Reports

Professor Starr may say that these were limitations from which he could not escape, even though he had wished to. Well, then, should he not in fairness discount his report as to conditions in proportion? In view of the procedure he adopted, we believe that even those who are moderate in their iudgment of Leopold's regime would be inclined to agree with those Congo officials who, as Professor Starr says, told him they "felt sure that such a visit as mine could do them only good."

Having duly heralded his purpose to investigate and speak freely of atrocities, Professor Starr proceeded forthwith to omit altogether from his field of inquiry the two chief regions of atrocities — the Domaine de la Couronne and the A.B.I.R. concession. The Domaine is, so to speak, Leopold's strictly private estate, administered by him individually, through three appointed directors. Its revenues, estimated by Professor Cattier, the distinguished Belgian student of the methods of Congo administration, at $14,000,000 in the last ten years, go to Leopold for his own personal use.

Missionary Reports Horrors

This immense district, in area one-tenth of the entire state, has never been thoroughly investigated, but so terrible is the report from the one man — a missionary named Scrivener — who has penetrated farthest iuto it, that it has been called "the Congo chamber of horrors." Mr. Scrivener, whose truthfulness has never been called in question, traversed a section of the Domaine in July, August and September, 1903. He reports that the country had been devastated and depopulated in the course of forced rubber collection — in one particular section the population having been reduced from 3,000 to 300 — and that the remaining natives were in a perpetual state of terror. Everything seemed to be on a military basis, with rubber collection as the motive. Mr. Scrivener says:

"The people are regarded as the property of the state for any purpose for which they may be needed. That they have any desires of their own, or any plans worth carryiug out in connection with their own lives, would create a smile among the officials. It is one continual grind, and the native intercourse between one district and another in the old style is practically nonexistent.

Large Tracts Are Deserted

"Only the roads to and fro from the various posts are kept open, and large tracts of country are abandoned to the wild beasts. The white man himself told me that you could walk on for five days in one direction and not see a single village or a single human being. Aaa this where formerly there was a big tribe!

"I was shown round the place (one of the state posts) and the sites of former big chiefs' settlements were pointed out. A careful estimate made the population of say, seven years ago to be 2,000 people in and about the post within the radius of, say, a quarter of a mile. All told they would not muster 200 now, and there is so much sadness and gloom that they are fast disappearing. * * * Lying about in the grass, within a few yards of the house I was oocupying, were numbers of human bones, in some cases complete skeletons. I counted thirty-six skulls, and saw many sets of bones from which the skull were missing. I called one of the men and asked the meaning of it. 'When the rubber palaver began,' said he, 'the soldiers shot so many we grew tired of burying, and very often we were not allowed to bury, and so just dragged the bodies out into the grass and left them. There are hundreds all round if you would like to see them.' But I had seen more than enough, and was sickened by the stories that came from men and women alike of the awful time they had passed through."

Quotes King's Commissioners

The Abir concession, lying directly north of the Domaine and of about one-half its area, is spoken of by Leopold's own commission of inquiry as follows:

"At the different posts in the Abir which were visited it was never denied that the imprisonment of women as hostages, the imposition of servile work on chiefs, the administration of the chicotte to the gatherers and the acts of brutality of the black overseers were, as a rule, habitual."

But Professor Starr dismisses this region lightly:

"It is, of course, but fair to state that I was not in the district of the A.B.I.R. I cannot believe, however, that conditions in that district are so appalling as the newspaper reports would seem to indicate."

There are many persons, perhaps, who would be inclined to value the commission's conclusions, which were based on the examination of witnesses, more highly

than Professor Starr's belief. There are likewise many who, on starting to read Professor Starr's setting forth of "the truth about the Congo," and finding that he did not visit either the A.B.I.R. concession or the Domaine, would conclude that his astuteness as manifested in his mode of investigation is equaled only by his thoroughness.

Holds Evidence Disregarded

With these limitations to Professor Starr's account in mind, let us turn to the evidence which he disregards. We desire to take only such evidence as must be accepted by him without question, and therefore we will for the time pass over the early reports of travelers like E. J. Glave, the companion of Stanley, Joseph Conrad and E. S. Grogan; the accounts of missionaries of unquestioned honesty like Revs. Joseph Clark, A Billington, C. L. Whitman, Edwin A. Layton, W. M. Morrison, G. B. Murphy, J. V. Sjoblom and John Weeks; official reports of consular officers like Dr. Baccari of Italy and Pickersgill and Casement of Great Britain; of Congo officials themselves like Williams and Moray; and of so reputable a member of the Belgian senate as M. Edouard Pickard. We will pass by this accumulated mass of evidence and come at once to the report of the commission of inquiry.

The appointment of this commission was forced upon Leopold by the combined pressure of indignant members of the Belgian parliament and by the British government. An effort was made by Leopold to shackle its activities by making the members subject to the direction of the Congo secretary of state, and this restriction was reluctantly removed only after further pressure from Great Britain.

Report Is Long Held Back

After the commission returned to Belgium, weeks, months elapsed, but still the report was not published. Indignant protests arose in the Belgian parliament, and the British government made further representations. At last, in November, 1905, the report was published, but without the sworn testimony on which it was based. Moreover, a cunning attempt was made to conceal its true nature from the English public. With each copy in the original French, which was distributed to the English press, there was printed in English what purported to be an "accurate summarized version." This "accurate summarized version" was accepted at its face value by most of the English papers and published by them. One paper, however, the London Daily Chronicle, translated the report for itself, and thereby exposed the whole ruse.

In this connection it is interesting that in the United States a translation was made—by one Professor James H. Gore of George Washington University—which contains over eighty mistranslations, all tending to soften the severity of the French original.

The report is therefore not only ex parte testimony, but reluctant testimony. Moreover it possesses another quality which will appeal strongly, we must assume, to Professor Starr—it is testimony from the scene.

Makes Exhaustive Inquiry

The commission went to the Free State, arriving there Oct. 5, 1904, and going back Feb. 21, 1905—a stay of four and one-half months. During that period the commission visited a wide area and took the sworn depositions of a great number of witnesses.

For the sections which were not visited—as well as for those that were—the commission came to conclusions by an examination of official records, and this fact makes the report all the more unquestionable. The commission states:

"We saw, it is true, only a part of the immense territory of the state. But one must not imagine that our field of inquiry was limited to the regions through which we passed. The information received by the commission regarding the districts not visited was sufficient to enable it to form a definite opinion as to conditions in all parts of the state, even if it could not investigate all the details. For, however widely extended might be the sources of testimony, it could not, in the estimation of the commission, be either the most important or the most reliable sort of information. In fact, the legal briefs of cases, the political reports, official correspondence, reports of judges, copies of letters of she commercial companies and administrative reports furnished the commission material of greater value in reaching a conclusion than the testimony of many witnesses."

Shows Nature of Testimony

So here we have the testimony of eye-witnesses. It is the testimony not of a single eye-witness, but of three, all eminent men—no, more than that, it is the testimony of the "hundreds"—as the commission states—of witnesses examined. It is testimony not secured and reported incidentally, by a traveler from whom certain abuses might possibly be

concealed, but gathered in accordance with a set purpose, by commissioners who had entire freedom in their investigations. Finally, it is testimony not confined to a limited area.

Whether, therefore, the report compares favorably with Professor Starr's account as evidence is a question we are willing to leave to the public.

* * * * * *

What does Leopold's commission say? First, what of the specific abuses, and then what of the general system underlying these abuses?

With reference to the specific abuses Professor Starr says:

"Flogging, chain gang, prison, mutilation, heavy taxation, hostages, depopulation—all these I saw, but at no time and no place were they so flagrant as to force themselves upon attention. And of frightful outrages, such as I had expected to meet everywhere, I saw absolutely none."

Remembering that Professor Starr's visits were known in advance to the authorities, and that he did not visit at all the two regions supposed to be most subject to abuses, we may turn to the section of the report dealing with these matters, and find the following statement regarding the coercion imposed upon the natives, as a means of rendering effective the labor tax. The commission discusses first coercion exercised directly by the white officials:

Tells of Barbaric Deeds

"When they (the assessments of produce) were not completely furnished the chiefs were arrested and some of the inhabitants taken at random, often the women were held as hostages. * * * The detention of the women as hostages outrages our notion of justice too violently to be tolerated. Likewise the arrest of the chiefs, who are not always personally to blame, has the effect of diminishing their authority or even completely destroying it; especially when they are seen forced to servile labor.

"In the same way the fixing of the length of the detention was left to the estimate of the agents. From the statements of witnesses and the official documents that we saw we found that this detention may have been continued, in certain cases, for several months.

Lives of Prisoners Are Lost

"It is beyond question that the detention is often aggravated by conditions which attend it. We have been told that the places in which the prisoners were kept were sometimes in a bad condition, that they often lacked the necessities and that the mortality among them was very great.

"Some of the chiefs of posts, assuming a right that never belonged to them, had the chicotte used upon those who fail to furnish the complete imposts. Some have been guilty of acts of cruelty, as is shown by the record of their punishment by the courts.

"These abuses are certainly not unknown in the private domain. From a study of the documents placed at the disposal of the commission, or demanded by it, we became acquainted with the majority of the facts testified to by the Rev. Messrs. Whitehead (Lukolela), Weeks (Monsembe), Gilchrist (Lulongo).

"Grievous acts of violence have been committed in the region of Lake Leopold II., Bangala, Lake Tumba, in Uele and Uruwimi.

Acts of Cruelty Frequent

"From an examination of documents regarding Mongala, and a careful inquiry made by the commission in regard to the Abir concession it appears that acts of the sort of which we are speaking were very frequent in the territory controlled by these companies (the concessionary companies). At the different posts in the Abir which we visited it was never denied that the imprisonment of women as hostages, the imposition of servile work on chiefs, the administration of the chicotte to the gatherers and the acts of brutality of the black overseers were, as a rule, habitual."

These extracts from the report are a sufficient reply to those persons who assert that the Congo officials—the whites—are not directly guilty of atrocities. The commission makes direct and unquestionable statements which disprove such an assertion. These statements are, unfortunately, generalities, such as "some (chiefs of posts) have been guilty of acts of cruelty"; "grievous acts of violence have been committed"; "acts of the sort of which we are speaking were very frequent," etc. Had the actual testimony been published with the report, these generalities could have been resolved into the concrete cases. But, as mentioned before, Leopold has not yet allowed this actual testimony to appear, though repeatedly challenged to do so. Why?

Builds Up Black Soldiery

In the history of the development of

the Congo situation there is one particularly striking instance of irony. The conference of Brussels in 1890 granted to Leopold, on his petition, the right to levy import duties. He represented that he needed additional revenues if he were effectively to prosecute a campaign against the Arab slave trade, according to the wishes of the conference.

Subsequently, however, this income from import duties has been used largely in raising and maintaining a black soldiery by means of which the Congo natives have been reduced to a state of slavery far worse, because more incessant and hopeless, than the former Arab slavery. The Congo system of exploitation is enforced, directly, by this black soldiery — now numbering about 30,000 men. For a description of the inevitable results we may again turn to the report of the commission:

"One means by sentries (sentili, native word, taken from the English) the black overseers, armed with muzzle-loading guns, who have the official duty of directing the work of the natives in the forest and of preventing the devastation of the same by the cutting of the rubber vines, but whose labors for the greater part of their time are limited to calling to the minds of the natives their obligation, seeing to it that they go to the forest and accompany the gatherers when they come to the post.

Authority Is Abused

"These auxiliaries, especially those who are detailed to the villages, abuse the authority committed to them, transform themselves into despots, demanding wives, food not only for themselves but also for a retinue of parasites and vagrants who, drawn by a love of rapine, become their associates and form a sort of bodyguard; they kill without pity those who make the least show of resistance to complying with their demands or caprice.

"It is not possible for us to say, even approximately, how many abuses these sentries have committed. Several chiefs in the Baringa region brought to us a bunch of sticks, each one of which was said to represent a subject killed by the capitas. One of them declared that in his village 120 had been killed.

"The least unfavorable opinion expressed in regard to the sentries was made by the director of the Abir, who said: 'The sentry system is an evil, but it is a necessary evil.' We do not share this view. According to our opinion, the nstitution of capitas and sentries, as we have seen it operate in Abir and Lulonga, ought to be suppressed."

Sentry System Is Retained

One of the severest counts against the Congo government at present is that this sentry system remains, essentially unchanged, in spite of the recommendation of Leopold's own commission that it be abolished. The plea has been that it is a "necessary evil," but the commission did not, after investigation, admit this plea. This difference of opinion between the Congo government and the commission is due to a difference in the respective premises adopted. The commission assumed that "a labor tax, as in the case of all taxes, should absorb only a small portion of the time of the individual."

On this basis the sentry system, in its present atrocious form, is not necessary. A smaller native police force, more closely controlled, could enforce the payment of such a tax, not without some violent incidents, perhaps, but certainly without the inevitable excessive atrocities under the existing regime.

However, the Congo government, as will appear in extracts to be quoted from the commission's report, has proceeded on the premise that as much labor and produce as possible should be forced from the native, and on this basis such a sentry system as exists at present is necessary, and the consequent abuses are a certain result.

State Is Held Responsible

It follows, therefore, that so long as the state clings to its system of commercial exploitation and employs these sentries to enforce it, just so long must the state be held responsible for the atrocities committed by the sentries. The sentries themselves cannot be burdened with the blame; the state, their master, is behind them.

That this is so is convincingly illustrated by the following letter, quoted in last spring's debate in the Belgian parliament, from a district commissioner to a chief of post:

"M. Le Chef De Poste: — Decidedly these people of Inory are a bad lot. They have just been and cut some rubber vines at Huli. We must fight them until their absolute submission has been obtained, or their complete extinction. Warn for the last time the people of Inoryo, and put into execution as soon as possible your project of accompanying them to the forest or else go to the village with a good trique (an instrument of punishment). When you arrive

at the first hut, speak as follows to the owner thereof: 'Here is a basket; you are to fill it with rubber. Go to the forest at once, and if in a week you have not returned with ten pounds of rubber I shall set fire to your hut, and you will burn.' The trique may be used to drive into the forest those who refuse to leave the village. By burning one hut after another I think you will not be compelled to proceed to last extremities before being obeyed. Inform the natives that if they cut another single vine I will exterminate them to the last man."

Ravages of the Expeditions

So much for the regular working of the Congo regime of force. The commission next discusses the "military expedition." It will be granted, of course, that in the occupation of a new region certain military demonstrations are necessary, and the commission states that it does not extend its criticism to these:

"We shall not speak of the expeditions which had for their purpose the subjugation of the natives or the suppression of their revolutions."

It is with such expeditions as are occasioned by the Congo system of commercial exploitation that the commission deals:

"In these cases (of such expeditions) the order issued by the superior officer of the expedition usually instructed him to recall the natives to their tasks.

"The vague generalities of such orders and in certain cases the thoughtlessness of the one to whom is charged their execution, have frequently had as a consequence unjustifiable murders.

"The military expedition sometimes takes on a character still more repressive. We shall now speak of those operations which have been called "punitive expeditions."

Sent to Punish Villages

"The order given to the commanding officer of a detachment was generally expressed in the following: 'N—is instructed to punish or chastise such and such a village.' The commission knows of several expeditions of this type, the results of which are frequently very murderous. One cannot be astonished at it.

"When the order of punishment comes from a superior authority it is very hard to keep the expedition from degenerating into a massacre, accompanied by pillage and destruction of property by fire."

Here, again, it is impossible for those pleading Leopold's cause to rest the blame on the black soldiers. The commission specifically calls attention to the responsibility of the white officials:

"The commission was struck by the general tone of the reports relative to the operations we have just been describing. Often the leaders of these expeditions, while stating that the expedition had been occasioned by the delinquency or delay on the part of the natives, and without even referring to an attack or the resistance on the part of the natives which alone should justify the use of arms, speak in their reports of 'surprise of villages,' of 'booty,' of 'prisoners of war,' of 'conditions of peace.'

Regarded Merely as War

"Evidently these soldiers were thinking of war; they acted as if at war. This is certainly not otherwise than what their chiefs intended. Under these conditions we are tempted to excuse the subordinates who did not take too literally the pacific character of their commission."

And the commission pronounces judgment on these abuses as follows:

"This condition cannot be prolonged. In the interest of the population and in that of the agents of the state it is important that the natives should not find themselves treated all at once as enemies beyond the law."

So much for the specific abuses in the Congo Free State. On these verbatim extracts from the report of Leopold's commission of inquiry we are willing to rest the question of whether these abuses are not "so flagrant as to force themselves upon attention."

Whole System Is at Fault

But these specific abuses, though they have perhaps most vividly impressed the public mind, are no more than symptoms of an underlying evil. That evil is the Congo system—a system of deliberate, cold-blooded commercial exploitation, in which the interests of the natives themselves are entirely disregarded, or at best regarded only in so far as is necessary in the process of exploitation.

"The moral and material regeneration of the natives," said Leopold in 1885, is "our only purpose."

What irony in present conditions! In his own Domaine, subject immediately to his control, Leopold should certainly have made headway in fulfilling his professions. But recall Mr. Scrivener's characterization of conditions there:

"The people are regarded as the property of the State for any purpose for whicc they may be needed. That they

have any desires of their own, or any plans worth carrying out in connection with their own lives, would create a smile among the officials."

These sentences describe the spirit of the system prevailing throughout the state. Father Vermeersch, the Belgian French priest who has recently written a powerful indictment of the Congo regime charges that conditions there present "the spectacle of an immeasurable misery," which he recognizes is the result of a system constituting "an immense expropriation." Could the atrocities by an extraordinarily efficient administration be reduced to the vanishing point, and yet the underlying system remain the same, those who are in the campaign for reforms in the Congo would continue the fight. Why? Because the Congo natives would still be bereft of their land and their labor. Because they would still be, not the object of the state's care, but the means to the enrichment of the "state"—the helpless victims of thoroughly sordid commercial greed.

* * * * * *

Now a fatal weakness of Professor Starr's defense of the Congo regime, which will prevent his article from seriously affecting those who appreciate the crux of the difficulty, is that he admits the existence of this system and its moral enormity. He says:

"There is taxation—yes, heavy taxation * * and in connection with taxation there is forced labor, a matter which, os course, I disapprove."

For a full description of these underlying conditions, which Professor Starr does not judge it worth while to discuss, we have but to go to the commission's report. Dealing with the land regime, the commission there describes the manner of native land tenure:

"At the time of the formation of the Free State, with the exceptiou of a few acres belonging to commercial houses at the mouths of the river or at Boma, there existed in the Congo no private property in the sense in which the term is used in European jurisprudence and the present civil code of the state. The many communities, under the authority of their chiefs, lived upon a vast territory belonging to the state without having cultivated more than a very small part of the same, but they made use of, in a certain measure, the surrounding lands."

Primitive System Obtains

That is, the usual manner of primitive land occupation prevailed. The state proceeded, however, as though the European system of landholding were established. Article 2 of the ordinance of July 1, 1885, decreed that "The vacant lands are to be regarded as belonging to the state."

The report goes on:

"As the greater part of the land in the Congo has never been under cultivation, this interpretation gives to the state a proprietary right absolute and exclusive to almost all of the lands, and as a consequence it can grant to itself all the products of the soil and prosecute as robbers those who gather the smallest fruit, and as accomplices those who buy the same. It could prohibit anyone from locating upon any portion of the greater part of the state; restrict the activities of the natives to a very limited space, and immobilize their economic condition. This principle applied abusively would oppose all evolution in the life of the native."

The commission condemns this system and urges that the state "insure to the natives the enjoyment of the lands held under the authority of their chief." It continues:

"While waiting for the completion of this work, the commission feels itself able to suggest a provisional solution which will be, in its opinion, just and practicable.

"It would be sufficient to abandon to the natives the enjoyment of the land surrounding their huts and of their fields and to allow them freely to dispose of the products of their lands, selling such as could be marketed.

"It is, in a word, the system adopted by the French government, which reserves to the natives, besides the villages occupied by them, the fields, pasture lands or forests, the boundaries of which have been established by the governor."

As is the case with the sentry system, this recommendation of the commission regarding the land system has not been acted upon (except in a petty and entirely inadequate way, to be referred to later), and the Congo native still remains landless in his own country.

Freedom of Trade a Fiction

Having no land, the native has no produce. The commission says:

"All of the natural products of the land are considered as being the property of the state or of the companies holding the concessions. Thus, although by law freedom of trade is formally recognized, the merchantable products in many districts are lacking to the natives."

The "freedom of trade" here referred

to is that of the natives. It follows from state appropriation of land and produce, however, that freedom of trade as concerns the nations is but a fiction. Thus has disappeared one of the central provisions of the Berlin act of 1885.

But the "system" goes still further, and having seized the native's land and produee, next forces him to labor—not occasionally, but incessantly. And the argument by which this labor-tax is justified is remarkable—for its naivete:

"Morever, the labor tax is the only tax that is possible at the present time in the Congo, for the native, as a rule, has nothing beyond his hut, hls weapons and the few plantations absolutely necessary for his sustenance. A tax implying a capital from which to pay it is impossible here."

Slavery as It Is Practiced

In discussing the working of the labor tax the commission deals first with the period prior to 1903, and describes the conditions throughout that period as follows:

"For a long time the administration thought it could draw from it (that is, from this secret decree) the rignt to make assessments, and also to delegate this right to companies, without in any way specifying the nature of the tax or the amouut of the prestation, or even the means that could be employed to procure them.

"In a general way, it should be said, all that concerned the prescriptions and prestation in relation to the natives was until recent years left to the discretion of the agents.

"Each chief of a post or factory demanded of the natives, without asking himself by what right, prestations of various sorts in the shape of labor and the products, whether to meet his own nreds or those of the post, or to aid in adding to the wealth of the state."

Passing then to the period since 1903:

"A decree of the king-sovereign, under date of Nov. 18, 1903, fixed a uniform law concerning taxes for the entire state.

Fixes Hours of Labor

"The decree fixes at forty hours a month the labor that each native owes the state. The time, considered as the maximum, cannot surely be regarded as too much, especially if one keeps in mind the fact that the labor is to be paid for; however, as in the great majority of cases, by the application of articles 31 and 34, it is not the labor that is demanded of the native but a quantity of produce equivalent to forty hours of work, the standard of time disappears and is replaced by an equivalent fixed by the commissioners of districts accordiug to different methods."

After discussing at some length the justice of measuring labor in terms of produce, the commission admits that the decree of 1903 instituted merely a nominal change, and that actual conditions are as insufferable as before:

"Up to the time of the visit of the commission this law had been put in force in only some of the districts.

"A circular of the governor general of the date of Feb. 29, 1904, informs the district commissioners that the enforcement of the new law regarding prestations should have as its effect not merely the maintenance of results achieved during the previous years but to show also a constant increase in the contributions to the treasury."

Professor Starr admits the existence of this labor tax. At the same time he expressess the opinion that the Congo natives are fairly happy!

Forced Labor Is Unending

The Congo commission of inquiry, after discussing the excessive nature of the so-called "labor tax" in the Free State, takes up seriatim the different kinds of labor-produce imposts. The two most important of these are the bread tax and the rubber tax, and the commission's accounts of their enforcement may be taken as typical. The first falls chiefly upon the women, the second on the men. Concerning the bread tax the commission says:

"The worst feature of this imposition is its continuity. As the chikwangue can be preserved only a few days, the native, even by doubling his activities, cannot succeed in freeing himself from his obligations during a period of any length. The imposition, even if it does not demand his entire time, besets him, therefore, continually, through the preoccupation of these approaching deliveries which make the task lose its true character and transforms it into incessant compulsory labor."

And concerning the rubber tax:

"In the majority of cases he (the native) must make a journey every fortnight which takes two or three days, sometimes more, in order to reach that part of the forest where he can find in sufficient quantity the rubber vines.

Lead Miserable Existence

"There for a certain number of days he leads a miserable existence. He must

construct for himself a temporary shelter, which certainly cannot take the place of his hut; he does not have the food to which he is accustomed, he is deprived of his wife, exposed to the inclemency of the weather and to the attacks of wild beasts. He must carry what he has gathered to the state post or to the company and not until then does he return to his village, where he can tarry only two or three days before the time for the next delivery is close at hand. It therefore appears that, whatever be his activity in the rubber forests, the native, because of the number of moves which he must make, sees the greater part of his time taken up in the gathering of rubber."

Father Vermeersch, already quoted, brands this so-called labor tax as nothing less than slavery:

"It appears undeniable that the Congo people have the honor, if not the pleasure, of being the most heavily taxed on the face of the earth. The tax which is called forty hours' labor is, in practice, for many natives a daily obsession from which they are never free, a tax of every day. Questioned as to their profession or career, many Congo natives might reply that they are professional payers of taxes.

Natives in Reality Slaves

"And as the slave is a man whose labor is not free, but who must work perpetually for the benefit of his master, who appoints his task, so the Congo natives are really the slaves or the serfs of the public authority. * * * It is impossible for the state to obtain the amount of rubber it sells annually by labor limited to forty hours a month, especially when it is borne in mind that a number of these hours are absorbed in other corvees. Of two things, one, therefore, is certain. Either the surplus is furnished freely (and if so, how can coercion be logically argued?) or this supplementary labor is forced, and if so, the law of forty hours is shown to be merely a fraud."

This, then, is the Congo "system." Professor Starr does not controvert its existence, but, as we have before pointed out, admits it. Therefore, his report of conditions has not abated a whit the fundamental urgency for remedial action. Particular instances of atrocity may be somewhat less common. Strange if this were not the case after the indignant outcry that has arisen in Europe and the United States.

But is Professor Starr, imbued as he is with a deep desire for the welfare of primitive people, content to see the Congo natives deprived of their land, their produce and their labor — beggars and slaves in their own country? Will he not raise his hand to restore them to the rights they once possessed and over which the nations expected Leopld to extend his protection? The desire to reinstate the Congo natives in their just rights as human beings is the animus of the Congo reform movement. If the commission had omitted altogether its findings as to specific abuses, which we have quoted in small part, its descriptions of the Congo system of land-produce-and-labor theft would sufficiently justify the movement.

No Sign of Improvement

The continuance of this system, in all its injustice and with all its evil consequences, has been testified to by many residents in the Congo, individually, and particularly by a group of these residents whose testimony must be given the greatest respect and weight. The high character of the members of this group was attested in a memorial concerning Congo conditions adopted by the recent missionary conference in Philadelphia, comprising representatives of forty mission boards of Canada and the United States, in these words:

"We speak with deep conviction concerning this issue, because we are intimately associated with many residents of the Congo State, by whom the conditions to which we refer have been disclosed. We are constrained to accept their testimony, we know that the earth does not hold men of more sensitive honor or of more self-sacrificing devotion. But you will not need to be reminded that other testimony than ours has been given to the character and credibility of these witnesses. A commission selected by King Leopold himself has said of them and of their fellow missionaries in the Congo State that they constitute for the native the sole representative of equity and justice. Of their testimony, dreadful as it has been, the commission has declared that they found it to be supported by a multitude of witnesses and established by a mass of evidence and official reports."

* * * * * *

The group of Congo residents in question was a conference of fifty-two Protestant missionaries, assembled in the Free State in January, 1906. Their reserved and earnest mode of expression in itself, aside from their unquestionable character, carries conviction:

"We, the undersigned evangelical missionaries from Great Britain, the United

States of America, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, working on the Congo, many of whom have been in the country for over twenty years, being assembled at our third general conference at Kinchassa, Stanley Pool, desire to place on record our views as to the present state of affairs in this country. We had hoped when we last met two years ago that some amelioration of the unhappy conditions of things existing would be effected, but we profoundly regret to state that in many parts of the land this condition is still unaltered.

"We are greatly disappointed that the memorial presented to the sovereign of the state through the governor general on the 1st of March, 1904, has elicited no reply. * * *

"We are convinced that the atrocities which have been abundantly proved and which still continue to be perpetrated, no less than the general oppression resulting from this so-called taxation, are the natural outcome of the system adopted, the radical alteration of which we see no sign.

Only Motive Is Humanitarian

"We have no object in view but that of the interests of humanity and the desire that the natives shall not be caused to disappear from off the face of the earth. And so we would utter again our solemn protest against the terrible state of affairs still existing in the Congo State, and we appeal in the name of justice, liberty and humanity to those who value these blessings to help in every lawful way to secure them for all the Congo peoples.

"Trusting in Almighty God, we send forth this our protest and appeal."

Try as they will, the defenders of the Congo government cannot detract from the gravity of this testimony. Hon. James Gustavus Whiteley, Leopold's busy consul general, with headquarters at Baltimore, is fond of repeating that this appeal was signed by but fifty-two missionaries out of a total of 500 residents in the Congo. It is true that no Roman Catholic missionaries signed the appeal, but for the very sufficient reason that the conference was attended only by Protestant missionaries.

Those who would attempt to inject sectarian feeling into this issue by demanding Catholic testimony we may refer, first of all, to the commissioners of inquiry themselves; then to so eminent a member of that church as Father Arthur Vermeersch, S. J., already quoted; to a large number of members of the Belgian parliament and to many Belgian Catholic newspapers. The Congo matter is not in origin and should not become a sectarian controversy.

As for the other Protestant missionaries in the Congo, this conference represented their views, and the appeal was issued in this representative spirit. Does Mr. Whiteley suppose that in a region 1,000 miles square all the missionaries can gather in these conferences? They are bound to be representative gatherings.

Professor Starr, with his deep-seated prejudice against missionizing, and a resulting, if unjustified, prejudice against missionaries, might be inclined to attempt to belittle the significance of this appeal, but it is doubtful whether his attempt would affect sympathetically the great body of people who know the character of these men and the nobility of their work.

Last June Leopold issued a number of so-called "reform edicts." To those who still hoped for real reforms from him these edicts came as a bitter disappointment and a final disillusionment. We need only quote a few representative extracts from American newspapers to show how patent the utter inadequacy of these edicts is:

NEW YORK TRIBUNE, June 24—The king decrees certain reforms. We might naturally interpret the fact as a tacit admission that there have been abuses needing reform. * * * When we * * * consider the nature and probable effect of the reforms * * * it is not easy to avoid a certain skepticism. * * * It is obvious that certain parts of the decrees are susceptible of gross and inhuman perversion, and some of them are so ingeniously framed as to provoke a suspicion that they may have been so intended.

BOSTON HERALD, July 6—Their (the reform decrees) superficiality as a measure of reform is clearly demonstrated. * * *

PITTSBURG DISPATCH, June 14—The tone which King Leopold of Belgium takes * * * shows that there is no hope of improvement if the matter is left in his hands.

BOSTON TRANSCRIPT, June 23—Apparently they (the reforms) all have strings to them. They are reforms whose application largely depends upon the discretion of those who most need reforming. * * * Of course King Leopold knows that what the powers have conferred they can recall, and it was necessary to make some response to their trouble-

some curiosity; but his answer does not seem to ring true. His sincerity is not a staff upon which the world's faith leans heavily.

CHICAGO NEWS, June 12—The reformatory measures suggested are exceedingly mild, and there is little reason to hope for real improvement.

Real Evils Are Untouched

The edicts are merely palliative, and but slightly at that. They leave practically untouched the fundamental evils—appropriation of land and produce, the excessive labor tax, the sentry system. In the matter of land they give the local officials permission to turn over to the natives three times the amount of land occupied at present. Since the natives have now only their hut spaces, three times this amount will profit them little. Moreover, there is no evidence as yet that even this paltry allowance has actually been granted—not on paper, but in square feet of soil. As for the labor tax, the forty-hour law is reiterated, as it has been before often, but without any practical changes, as the commission pointed out. The sentry system is qualified only by a dubious restriction as to the kinds of guns to be carried. And finally, the enforcement of these measures is left to the very officials who have been convicted of the abuses which the edicts propose to remedy.

Since there can be no hope of true reforms from Leopold himself, some outside power must be depended upon. If Belgium will force reforms, well and good. Professor Starr goes out of his way to predict that Belgian annexation would not satisfy the present objectors.

This prediction is entirely ungrounded. Earl Grey, the British foreign secretary, has announced that Great Britain would be entirely satisfied with annexation of the Free State to Belgium, provided only the annexation is genuine, and not merely nominal. The eleven days' debate recently concluded in the Belgian house of representatives seemed to indicate that the present proposed plans of annexation would make the transfer no more than nominal, leaving Leopold still practically in control. No such half measures should be tolerated. The powers signatory to the acts of Berlin and Brussels have the right to insist that the terms of these acts, which Leopold has so flagrantly violated, should no longer be disregarded.

* * * * * *

Professor Starr seemed carefully to eliminate from his articles any recognition of the close relation of the United States to the Congo Free State. He did not say that it was an American citizen, Henry M. Stanley, who first opened the Congo region to the world, and who later negotiated Leopold's treaties with the native chiefs and established his posts.

He did not say that an American General Henry S. Sanford, was one of Leopold's chief helpers in the beginning of the African enterprise.

He did not say that Leopold sent this same General Sanford to the United States, when an Anglo-Portuguese treaty threatened his Congo designs, to plead for recognition of the "International Association of the Congo" by the United States.

He did not say that the United States gave this recognition in April, 1884, before any other power had given it, and thereby probably saved the association from extinction.

He did not say that at the conference of Berlin, in 1884-85, which gave to the Congo Free State its peculiar character as an international trusteeship, the United States was second only in influence to Germany.

He did not say that at this conference one of the delegates of the United States acted as the virtual representative of Leopold's association, and was to a great extent responsible for the favor shown the association.

He did not say that the United States was a full signatory of the act of Brussels of 1891, and that it is in view of the terms of this act that our government is at present proceeding.

Terms of the Treaty Broken

He did not say that the United States has a treaty with the Congo Free State, certain terms of which have been broken.

He omitted mention of these historical facts because they render nugatory his concluding article on the question of whether the United States should take any action with reference to the present situation.

This is not a foreign situation, participation in the remedying of which by the United States would be an arrant and unwarranted interference. It is, on the contrary, a situation for which the United States is largely responsible, and in connection with which the United States has clear rights and responsibilities.

Professor Starr's arguments about the possibilities of European complications are, therefore, mere excuses for shirking

a clear duty. Likewise Professor Starr's contentions that because conditions are bad in other African possessions we should not single out the Congo for special action are beside the point. Granting that conditions in other possessions are not what they should be, the evidence at hand goes to show that the situation is far worse in the Free State—that is the first pertinent rejoinder. In the second place, these other African possessions are in every case subject to regularly organized, responsible and more or less parliamentary government control, while the Free State has been subject to the will of one man who declares himself free from responsibility to anyone. In the third place, abuses in the Free State are more practically within reach of international action, since the Free State was in origin and should still be recognized as an internation trust. Finally, international consideration and correction of the abuses in the Free State will go far toward leavening the whole African loaf, and is the readiest means of bringing about better government for all of central Africa.

Holds Argument Is False

As to the contention that the United States should not consider the Congo abuses till its own hands are white, that is a trite argument, used often, but evidently without the understanding that if acted upon it would at once end all progress; for what man or nation is spotless? All progress is based on the assumption that we can help others while we ourselves need help. In fact, it is often by helping others that we, by a reactionary effect, best help ourselves, and it is very believable that a humanitarian intervention in behalf of the Congo natives would go far toward awakening the American people to the injustices in the Philippines and through the South, of which Professor Starr complains.

When we come to Professor Starr's assertion that the Congo reform movement originated in the jealousy of Liverpool merchants, and that now "the laudable impulses and praiseworthy sympathies of two great people are being used for hidden and sinister ends of politics," we desire to ask him first of all whether such grave charges should be insinuated without good evidence—whether, in fact, he should not at once go further than insinuation and submit his proof.

The careless slur that Professor Starr thus cast upon the governments of Great Britain and the United States and upon a great number of the most esteemed men and women in both countries ill befits a man who has laid stress on his fair judgment after a survey of the facts. The presumption of a man who, singly and alone, undertakes to oppose his judgment to the testimony of scores of men presumably as honest as he and to the conclusions of two governments, arrived at after a long and careful examination of all the evidence available, is astounding, if nothing more.

Thinks Proof Is Conclusive

The fact that the Senate, after nearly three years' consideration of the Congo situation, has now passed a resolution (even after Professor Starr has added his voice to those who still repeat the old catch-word, "Liverpool merchants") will to most minds be proof suffieient of the truth of the charges made against Leopold's African regime, unless good evidence to the contrary is adduced. So far those who have been crying "Liverpool merchants" have brought forward no proofs whatever—and it is time that they should, or that they should retract.

Which will Professor Starr do?

However, on this point a sufficient reply is that, questions of motive aside, if the abuses exist, they should be removed, and it is but a cowardly course to shirk a clear duty because of a vague risk. If there are "hidden and sinister ends of politics" these same "laudable impulses and praiseworthy sympathies" will not countenance them, but will insist that any intervention in the Congo confine itself to purely humanitarian ends.

But, setting aside the value of these considerations for a moment, we should like to put to Professor Starr a pertinent and direct question. How did he justify himself in attaching his name, in January, 1905, to a memorial to Congress, urging intervention by the United States in the Congo situation?

Sums Up Starr's Objections

In his recent concluding article the reasons he urges for noninterference by this country are entirely outside the question of the truth of the abuses charged. He waives the question of abuses and he says that the United States should not interfere—

1. Because of possible European complications.
2. Because conditions are bad in other African possessions, and
3. Because there are abuses in our own possessions.

But these conditions all held as true when he signed the memorial as they do today. There were risks of European

complications then. There were abuses in other African possessions then. We had our South and the Philippines then. It seems that concurrently with his visit to the Congo country has come a change in his logical processes.

Though, in view of the evidences available, and the most incontestable of which we have quoted above, we cannot agree with Professor Starr's conclusions as to the gravity of conditions in the Congo Free State, we applaud cordially the service he has done in bringing the life and the character of the Congo natives more vividly and sympathetically to the attention of the American public. Disaster coming near at home, suddenly, and involving members of our own nation and race, arouses our sympathy easily, as witness the noble response to relieve the misery wrought by the San Francisco earthquake. But suffering far removed geographically, long drawn out and but inadequately reported, and of which the victims are of another race, makes but a weak and slow appeal to the emotions.

Says Result Will Be Good

So for a quarter of a century the wretchedness of the Congo natives has continued, little heeded by the world at large. We feel sure that Professor Starr's articles, wherever they are read, and particularly in the United States, will arouse a latent sympathy for the Congo folk, to whose ability and intelligence he repeatedly calls attention.

People will begin to appreciate that the Congo natives are not mere clods, brutes, an impediment in the way of civilization, and will recognize that they are human beings, quite like those elsewhere, living a similiar life and latent with possibilities. Recognizing this, our people will be led to give more than passing attention to the charges, now become so great a mass, that these Congo natives are being rapidly exterminated under the workings of a ruthless system of commercial exploitation.

People will insist that these charges be at least investigated by a tribunal of unquestioned impartiality—an international tribunal. They will say: "If Leopold's house is clean he need have no fear of throwing it open to the inspection of the world. If it prove unclean, we will insist it be made clean.